



Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Local Government and ABS is a quarterly newsletter created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) aimed at helping the Local Government Sector use statistics to assist with planning and other community servicing decisions.

A specific aim of this newsletter is to help you easily find information on the ABS website. It explains the structure of the ABS website and provides direct electronic links to statistical series of use to local government. Electronic links are coloured and underlined and can be activated using the mouse button. Statistical terms are also explained to help make sense of more complex data.

Local Government and ABS provides a central contact point where you can provide your views and suggestions as to how the ABS can better assist local government.

We encourage you to forward this newsletter to others and post it on your bulletin board. Anyone is welcome to receive Local Government and ABS. To subscribe, just send an email to jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au with "subscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter please unsubscribe by sending an email to jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au with "unsubscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line.

In this issue:

- [What is the CPI?](#)
- [Local Government Area changes - ASGC towards the Census 2006](#)
- [Mesh Blocks - we want your suggestions](#)
- [Where do I start - Conducting A Research Project](#)
- [Australia in Profile - A Regional Analysis](#)
- [A new path to Regional Statistics](#)
- [What's happening in Local Government Finance](#)
- [Links to previous editions of Local Government and ABS](#)
- [Newsletter contact details](#)

[Back to top](#)

What is the CPI?

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) has been specifically designed as a general measure of price inflation for the household sector as a whole. The simplest way of thinking about the CPI is to imagine a basket of goods and services comprising items typically bought by Australian households. As prices vary, the total cost of this basket will also vary. The CPI is simply a measure of the changes in the cost of this fixed basket over time.

The CPI measures price changes relating to the spending pattern of all metropolitan households in the six State capital cities, Darwin and Canberra. The basket of goods and services is divided into a number of major commodity groups, subgroups and expenditure classes. It covers expenditure on the following broad items: food; alcohol and tobacco; clothing and footwear; housing; household furnishings, supplies and services; health; transportation; communication; recreation; education; as well as on some other miscellaneous items. To ensure the basket remains representative of current spending habits, it is revised about every five years.

The price of the CPI basket in the base period (currently 1989-90) is assigned a value of 100.0 and prices in other periods are expressed as percentages of the price in the base period. For example, if the price of the basket had increased by 15% since the base period then the CPI would read 115.0.

CPI Main features are available at no charge on the ABS website. The publication **Consumer Price Index, Australia** (ABS Cat no. 6401.0) can be viewed free at your **local library** and presents quarterly movements in retail prices of goods and services commonly purchased by metropolitan private households. Indexes are compiled and published for each of the groups, subgroups and expenditure classes for each of the six State capital cities, Darwin and Canberra. National indexes are constructed as the weighted average of the indexes for each of the eight capital cities.

A Guide to the Consumer Price Index: 14th Series (ABS Cat no. 6440.0) provides more detail in regard to: what the CPI is; to whom the CPI relates; and how it is calculated.

The CPI has always been an important economic indicator and in recent years actions related to movements in the CPI have had direct or indirect effects on all Australians. For example, it is used as part of the funding equation for the allocation of funding to Local Government; it is used by the Reserve Bank of Australia in determining monetary policy; it is used to index Social Security and superannuation payments; and it is used in a range of business contracts for price adjustment.

It is important to note, however, that while the CPI is often used in business contracts for price adjustment, the price pressures faced by business may be very different to those faced by households. For this reason, the CPI may not be the most appropriate index for this purpose. Instead, users should be aware that the ABS produces a number of labour cost and producer price indexes which may be more appropriate. More detail regarding these indexes will be provided in future editions of this Newsletter. In the meantime, if you require additional information about any of these indexes contact Steve Whennan on 02 6252 6251 or email steve.whennan@abs.gov.au.

[Back to top](#)

Local Government Area changes - ASGC towards the Census 2006

Previous editions of this Newsletter described how the **Australian Standard Geographic Classification 2001** defined Local Government Areas (LGAs) and Collection Districts (CDs).

The process of ensuring that this geographical classification remains relevant takes considerable time. This article outlines the role that ABS Area Classification Officers play in affecting change into the ASGC. In particular it describes what is involved in processing changes to LGA boundaries and explains how early official gazettal facilitates work in the lead up to the release of an updated edition, especially the edition used for the Census of Population & Housing 2006.

Local Government Area changes

Each ABS office has an Area Classification Officer, responsible for monitoring that state or territory's statistical geography and identifying issues which may affect the ASGC - including changes to local government areas.

Changes concerning local governments which affect the ASGC are those which are officially proclaimed, with a confirmed date of effect, in the government gazettes produced by the state and territory governments. These include changes to boundaries, names and status. When such official gazettals are identified the following events usually occur:

- if boundaries are affected the relevant government departments and/or local councils will be contacted by the ABS to provide mapping depicting the change if this has not already been obtained;
- knowledge regarding the numbers of dwellings and if possible population affected will be sought; and
- once all data is confirmed, the material is passed to Area Classification in Central Office for further processing such as code allocation if a new area is involved, and then for inclusion into the ASGC edition being prepared.

The confirmation process takes time to check and verify changes and includes the important assessment of the impact upon other geographical areas and structures of the ASGC.

The effective date for each ASGC edition is 1 July for that year and includes LGA changes gazetted since the release of the previous edition.

If a LGA boundary, status or name change is officially gazetted after the cut-off date for the ASGC edition under preparation, that change will be held over for inclusion in the next edition.

Towards the Census 2006

The ABS will be conducting the fifteenth national Census of Population and Housing in August 2006.

Through its geographical classification the ABS releases statistics for many different types of areas, including a state or territory's local government structure. Preparation for the 2006 census edition of the ASGC is already underway.

For a census, currently, the lowest level of geography defined in the ASGC is the Census Collection District. CD boundaries change between censuses for a number of reasons. Their redesign is influenced by many things such as population growth in a particular area or to facilitate collector requirements. The magnitude of the process surrounding the redesign of CDs for the ASGC edition 2006 means that the ABS has already commenced this work. Importantly, current ASGC criteria dictate that CDs cannot cross Local Government Area boundaries.

So, to have the wealth of census data available for the LGA structure of a state or territory as applicable at census night in August 2006, it is important that planned changes to LGAs are officially gazetted earlier rather than later - preferably prior to the ASGC edition 2005 date of effect, 1 July 2005. In Area Classification terms, after that date, only the most minor of changes will be able to be processed for inclusion in the ASGC edition 2006. Those changes which are officially gazetted between August 2005 and June 2007 are not likely to be represented in the ASGC until the ASGC edition 2007, date of effect 1 July 2007.

The ABS Area Classification Officers will be working closely with relevant authorities to keep abreast of both proposed and officially gazetted changes to the LGAs in their state and territory.

[Back to top](#)

Mesh Blocks - we want your suggestions

A new ABS Position paper, **Mesh Blocks (ABS Cat. no. 1209.0)** was released on 16 March 2004. In the previous edition of this Newsletter we explained how Mesh Blocks represent a fundamentally new approach to statistical geography. About four to five times smaller than a Census Collection District (CD), Mesh Blocks will aggregate reasonably accurately to almost any geographical area. The ABS plans to increase the quantum and quality of geographically referenced statistics by linking street addresses to Mesh Blocks, thus enabling the coding and aggregation of almost any location specific data into meaningful statistics. The ABS values your suggestions for the essential design criteria of Mesh Blocks. Responses to the Paper should be directed to the following: Director, Geography, Australian Bureau of Statistics, PO BOX 10, Belconnen 2616; or by email: **geography@abs.gov.au**. Responses should reach the ABS prior to 30 June 2004.

[Back to top](#)

Where do I start - Conducting A Research Project

Many clients often do not know where to start when asked to write up a project description or outcomes. Conducting A Research Project has been published on the ABS Website and is available free of charge.

It has been designed to assist users of statistics for example:

- clearly define a project;
- identify statistical sources;
- acknowledge references.

The paper provides a systematic approach to undertaking research projects as well as a framework around the gathering of social statistics. If you don't know where to start this reference will be of help.

[Back to top](#)

Regional Analysis

"Australia in Profile - A Regional Analysis" (ABS cat. no. 2032.0) uses results from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing to describe some of the major differences in the social, economic and demographic characteristics of people living in different parts of Australia.

The report includes seven thematic chapters discussing topics of social interest and concern in a range of areas including cultural diversity, living arrangements, employment and unemployment, income and living standards and housing. Each chapter compares and contrasts the circumstances of people living in mainly urban and mixed urban/rural regions, and identifies regions with the highest or lowest proportions of people with particular characteristics.

One of the strengths of the census is to provide detailed information for small geographic areas. "Australia in Profile - a Regional Analysis" capitalises on this strength to present information for 118 regions, based on ABS geographical areas called Statistical Divisions (SDs). To give more evenly sized regions, SDs in populous areas have been disaggregated to Statistical Subdivisions (SSDs) or Statistical Region Sectors (SRSs).

Each thematic chapter includes a detailed social indicator table which presents a selection of key indicators for each of these 118 regions, as well as further disaggregation for many rural regions. At a glance, regions can be compared at the national, state and local levels.

In addition, two case studies, one about South Eastern Outer Melbourne (SSD) and one about North West Queensland (SD), provide examples of how a range of statistics can be drawn together to describe key social and economic characteristics of a region.

Australia in Profile - A Regional Analysis can be viewed free at many **public libraries**. Contact your local library to find out how to best access this title.

[Back to top](#)

A new path to Regional Statistics

Have you found it hard to find data on the ABS website relevant to your local government area? The ABS has now released the National Regional Profile from which you can quickly obtain essential information on your council area. This free, web based product, allows you to download a spreadsheet containing a range of indicator information for a standard area of your choice. The National Regional Profile will assist in the consistent quantitative measurement, evaluation and comparison of the performance of regions.

Access to the National Regional Profile facility is through the new 'Regional Statistics' icon on the ABS **home page**. Clicking on this icon will take you to the ABS' Regional Statistics Program Theme Page which contains not only a link to the National Regional Profile, but also information about other aspects of the program that may be of interest to you including additional **regional products** with state specific data series and comparative information.

Information is available for Local Government Areas, Statistical Local Areas, Statistical Subdivisions, Statistical Divisions, States/Territories as well as at the Australia level. The National Regional Profile combines a range of ABS and non-ABS information within an easy to use facility including population, births and deaths, remoteness, unemployment, income support customer numbers, wage and salary earners, new vehicle sales and building approvals.

To obtain information about the region of your choice, use the drill-down map facility or choose the selected region's name from a picklist. The choice is yours, and remember, the National Regional Profile is free.

At the moment the National Regional Profile contains data for only one year. The next version, expected to

be released early in 2005, will contain a five year time series for each region. It is also anticipated that, over time, the suite of indicators will grow.

This National Regional Profile does not, however, contain data from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing. Information from the Census is available through the **2001 Census Page** on the ABS website.

Contact

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[Back to top](#)

What's happening in Local Government Finance

Local government finance information for 2002-03 will be published in **Government Finance Statistics, Australia (ABS cat. no. 5512.0)** which is scheduled for release on 1 April, 2004. This hard-copy publication contains consolidated financial statements together with a dissection of expenses by purpose aggregated to the total State/Territory level. Data at a finer level of detail are available for purchase through any state office of the ABS. [Note : Enquirers for these data are advised to contact the ABS (see contact details below) in the first instance to determine how requests are best serviced in their jurisdiction. In some jurisdictions, it is the preference of the State/Territory local government agency that requests for data be directed to them rather than to the ABS. Other agencies do not have appropriate data provision systems in place and prefer to leave the data dissemination role with the ABS.]

Some preliminary findings from the 2002-03 survey have been :

Data Item (For Total Sector unless otherwise indicated)	NSW (\$M)	Vic (\$M)	Qld (\$M)	SA (\$M)	WA (\$M)	Tas (\$M)	NT (\$M)
Taxation Revenue	2 346	1 826	1 423	629	752	175	49
Total Assets	70 699	35 606	38 596	8 866	9 181	4 614	1 035
General Govt Expenses - Social Security & Welfare	297	624	44	41	79	17	7

There has been good response by councils to the 2002-03 data collection forms recently despatched and collected by each State/Territory local government agency. Information provided on these forms is the basis for the ABS' data holdings relating to local government financial activity. It is from this database that requests for data about various aspects of local government activity are serviced. Important policy decisions concerning the sector can be based on this information and consequently it is important that accurate and timely information is returned by councils in the questionnaire.

The quarterly collection was initiated on 22 March when the customary request was made to selected units to provide the usual limited range of data items to the ABS. As with the annual collection, information is returned electronically but in this case, to the ABS. A return date of 13 April, 2004 has been set for the March quarter's survey.

During the months of April and May, personnel from the ABS' Local Government Statistics Unit (LGSU) will be visiting Depts of Local Government and/or Local Government Grants Commissions throughout Australia to review the 2002-03 annual survey and to commence preparations for the 2003-04 cycle. Issues under discussion will include the likely incorporation of the Local Government Purpose Classification (LGPC) into most collection forms.

Depending on availability, it may also be possible to make personal contact with other key members of the Local Government Sector in each jurisdiction, during the visits.

Contacts

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[Back to top](#)

Links to previous editions of Local Government and ABS

[Local Government and ABS Edition 4 December 2003](#)
[Local Government and ABS Edition 3 September 2003](#)
[Local Government and ABS Edition 2 June 2003](#)
[Local Government and ABS Edition 1 March 2003](#)

Newsletter contact details

This newsletter is one way to help improve communication between the ABS and the Local Government Sector. New ABS initiatives to assist local government organisations will be announced in this newsletter as they evolve. We would like your views and suggestions about this newsletter so that it remains useful and assists you to understand and use ABS statistics. Please email comments to the Local Government Sector Account Manager, jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au or telephone (08) 82377621

[Back to top](#)

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